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SUMMER 2003

The Update

NEWSLETTER OF THE MASSACHUSETTS COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

MCSW Celebrates Fifth Anniversary

The Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women (MCSW) celebrated its fifth anniversary with *"Women's Commissions Day at The State House"* on May 19. The event was co-sponsored by the Massachusetts Caucus of Women Legislators. There were over 100 guests in attendance. The day marked the five-year anniversary of the passage of the legislation that created the MCSW and honored those who helped to create it. The event also highlighted the priorities of the Commission and the Caucus, particularly their fight to end violence against women.

The Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women was enacted by law in May 1998. The legislation was inspired by the United Nations' Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in September 1995. One result of this conference was the Beijing Platform for Action, which recommended that state and federal governments support councils, commissions, networks, and other organizations that focus on women's issues.

Specifically, the Platform directed state governments to "form and adequately fund Women's Commissions in all states and territories where they do not already exist." Massachusetts' delegates to the Beijing Conference returned determined that Massachusetts would have its own Women's Commission. Their passion helped to create a coalition of women that met regularly over the course of several years to bring this dream to fruition. In the end, with the help of many, particularly state legislators, they were able to fashion a unique and model Commission — with appointing authority shared by the Executive and Legislative branches.

Ready to cut the Anniversary cake are, left to right: MCSW Commissioners Mary Clare Higgins, Jo Anne Thompson, Mary Reardon Johnson, Donna Finneran, and Marianne Fleckner (in front of cake). Behind Marianne are Susana Segat, Dr. Roseanna Means, Executive Director Linda Brantley, Elaine Guiney, and Nilka Alvarez-Rodriguez.

Pictured above at the Fifth Anniversary celebration are, left to right, MCSW Commissioner Dr. Roseanna Means; Yoko Kato, Domestic Violence Advocate; and Lieutenant Governor Kerry Healey.

When the Commission was created, it was established as an independent state agency with funding provided by a line item in the state budget. Its appointing authorities include the Governor, Senate President, Speaker of the House of Representatives and the MA Women's Legislative Caucus.

Recognition of the Commission's "Founding Mothers" was a key part of the anniversary celebration. Receiving Certificates of Appreciation for their commitment and efforts were Susan Roosevelt Weld, Jo Anne Thompson, Martha Chadwick, Virginia Greiman, Nancy Ryan, Marie Turley, Maya Hasegawa, Antonia Jimenez, Barbara Langford, Diane Moriarity, Patricia Nickerson, Samantha Overton, Suleyken Walker, Priscilla Golding and Jean Inman.

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Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women

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COMMISSIONER NOTES

Commissioner Martha Chadwick is the MCSW's newest Commissioner. The Commission welcomes Martie, a resident of Boston, who is currently employed at the Department of Public Health. Commissioner Chadwick held pivotal roles in the last three Republican administrations, serving as a Special Assistant to Governor Jane Swift and Susan Roosevelt Weld, as well as working as Director of Finance for the state Republican party from 1991 to 1993. She was also a special project manager for the MA Office of Business Development from 1997 to 2001.

Commissioner Chadwick was instrumental in helping to create the MCSW. She is a founding member of Mass Action for Women, a member of the Mass Women's Political Caucus, Boston Symphony Council of Volunteers, the Junior League, and a former Wellesley Town Meeting member. She has been recognized for her commitment to women's issues with the Wonder Woman award of the Mass Women's Political Caucus and received an Outstanding Achievement Award from Lt. Governor Argeo Paul Cellucci.

Commissioner Nilka Alvarez-Rodriguez gets kudos for receiving a Coordination Honor Award from the Office of Justice Programs' (OJP) Executive Office for Weed and Seed (EOWS), for the formation and successful operation of the Lawrence Weed and Seed program. Operation Weed and Seed is foremost a strategy that aims to prevent, control, and reduce violent crime, drug abuse, and gang activity in targeted high-crime neighborhoods across the country. The Honor Awards recognize an exemplary coordination effort where Weed and Seed residents and organizations are working together effectively to implement the site's Weed and Seed strategy. The Commissioner's program was one of ten sites to receive the awards, which were bestowed during the Fifth Annual National Weed and Seed Conference, held this spring in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Commissioner Angela Menino, First Lady of Boston and community advocate, received the I Migliori Award from the Pirandello Lyceum, an organization which aims to disseminate a greater appreciation of Italian culture.

Commissioner Mary Reardon Johnson, Executive Director of the YWCA of Western Massachusetts, is shown above, second from left, at the groundbreaking of a new YWCA headquarters and a 48-bed shelter for battered women and their children in Springfield. This project marks the first facility in Massachusetts built specifically as a shelter to serve the victims of domestic violence. Also participating were State Senators Linda J. Melconian, shown at left, and other state officials.

Commissioner Elaine Guiney was the moderator and keynote speaker at the Merrimack Valley Chamber of Commerce's Women in Government annual luncheon, attended by over 125 women.

MCSW Endorses Women's Caucus Legislative Priorities

The Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women has endorsed the Massachusetts Caucus of Women Legislators 2003-2004 legislative priorities.

Each legislative session, the Women's Caucus selects legislative priorities that reflect the Caucus' mission of advancing the economic status and equality of women. This session the Women's Caucus selected three bills as top priorities. The Commission, on the recommendation of its Legislative Subcommittee, voted to endorse these bills and to work with the Caucus towards their enactment.

Bills deemed priorities include:

- **An Act to Establish a Self-Sufficiency Standard in the Commonwealth** requires the Commonwealth to establish a Self-Sufficiency Standard that will provide a measure of the real costs of living, working, raising a family, and paying taxes in Massachusetts.
- **An Act Establishing a Bill of Rights for Victims of Rape and Sexual Assault** extends the protections afforded to sexual assault victims in criminal trials to victims who choose to pursue civil actions arising from their assault. It also extends the statute of limitations on rape and sexual assault charges or civil actions in cases where DNA evidence is available.
- **An Act Prohibiting Discrimination in Insurance Policies** codifies the regulations promulgated by the Commissioner of Insurance in 1987 with regard to prohibiting discrimination in insurance policies or prohibiting insurers from differentiating terms, rates, benefits or requirements based upon sex.

Introducing MCSW's New Executive Director, Linda Brantley

We welcome Linda Brantley as the new Executive Director of the Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women. Brantley has over 20 years experience in public, community, media and government relations, marketing, and event planning. For the past ten years she worked in public higher education, employed at Northern Essex Community College in Haverhill and Lawrence, MA. Her main responsibilities included fundraising, outreach to business and industry and workforce development, public relations, legislative, community and media relations. She is the 2002 recipient of the Greater Haverhill YWCA's Tribute to Women "Woman of the Year" Award and is a co-creator, alumnae and former coordinator of Leadership Merrimack Valley, NECC's 10-month leadership development program.

Brantley holds a dual degree in journalism and management from Syracuse University and is a former newspaper journalist. She also worked in the healthcare industry for five years as Director of Community Relations at Martha's Vineyard Hospital.

For the past seven years Brantley has been involved with work on women's issues, including being a charter member and three year co-chair of the Winning Opportunities for Women Committee of the Greater Haverhill Chamber of Commerce, a former member of the YWCA of Greater Haverhill Board of Directors and steering committee member for its Tribute to Women Committee, and a volunteer with State Treasurer Shannon O'Brien's Money Conference for Women. She was recognized by Strathmore's Who's Who of American Women in 1998-99.

The new Executive Director says, "I feel truly honored to be able to embrace the mission of the Commission and work with such an impressive group of women. I am extremely excited about this opportunity and pledge my full commitment and dedication to working with the Commissioners to lead the organization to a bright and successful future. I commend the Commission for the strides it has made already, particularly with this year's two identified priorities of violence against women and advocating for improved childcare opportunities for working families. I look forward to working with the Commission and staff to build on these efforts as we strive to better advocate for and help meet the needs of Massachusetts women."

Marianne Fleckner, chair of the MCSW, noted, "We are thrilled to have Linda join us as the new Executive Director of the Commission on the Status of Women. Her wealth of knowledge and expertise on women's issues will prove invaluable as we forge ahead in 2003 and beyond."

Brantley and members of the Commission are available to speak and work with like-minded agencies and she encourages anyone interested to contact her at 617-626-6520.

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New Handbook is a Resource for Massachusetts Women

A new handbook titled *"How to Get Appointed to Boards and Commissions"* is now available as a resource for women of the Commonwealth. This free publication, a special project of the Commission, addresses the Commission's mandate to empower, identify and recommend qualified women for appointive positions at all levels of government, including boards and commissions.

"The Commission believes it is imperative that more women participate in the policy and decision-making processes of their state and local governments. Through this involvement, all women's voices will be better heard," said Marianne Fleckner, Commission chair.

The publication, which lists the major Massachusetts state boards and commissions, is designed to provide women easy access to information about the many opportunities available to them. State boards and commissions are a significant component of state government. Members are able to affect public policy, network and access state policy makers, and represent their constituencies and perspectives.

The Commission hopes that the creation and wide distribution of this directory will educate and encourage women to seek out appointments and play an active role in their communities and state. This in turn will ultimately increase the number of qualified female candidates and further the accountability of state government in fulfilling its responsibility to address women's issues and concerns.

To receive a free copy, contact the Commission at 617-626-6520 or send a request by e-mail to mscw@state.ma.us.

MCSW Holds Greater Boston Public Hearing

Over 75 people from Greater Boston attended a public hearing sponsored by The Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women at Simmons College this June. Commissioners and staff heard testimony from many Massachusetts women and organization leaders on various issues such as, the impact of this year's budget cuts on women and their families, where gaps or barriers in service exist, and what women of the Commonwealth need. The event was co-sponsored by the Simmons Institute for Leadership and Change, and local Women's Commissions of Boston, Cambridge and Somerville. Among those in attendance were leaders of Planned Parenthood, Jane Doe Inc., Rape Crisis Centers, Greater Boston NOW, Fenway Community Health Center, MA Legal Assistance, and the MA Breast Cancer Coalition. The attendees testified on how budget cutbacks will affect women's basic needs at a time in their lives when these services are most crucial.

Susan Whalen from the MA Breast Cancer Coalition noted the coalition has experienced a cutback of $100,000 in its budget.

Jamie Suvak of the Boston Area Rape Crisis Center testified on the need for the current 18 statewide centers. "The crisis center receives 350 calls per month and offers 24-hour emergency room accompaniment. These women have a right to a voice to eliminate sexual violence, not financial cutbacks." If the budget passes as is, 13 of these centers will close.

Need caption.

A counselor from the Pine Street Inn shelter testified about how cutbacks in human services, such as MA Health, have impacted our most vulnerable citizens. "More and more of our homeless in need are women and their children. These women become homeless for many reasons, some through no fault of their own."

Ronald Owens, Resource Advocate/ Teacher from the WAITT House Inc. in Roxbury, spoke about how budget cuts have hurt adult basic education. His program is in danger, even though most of the people who attend, over 60% of whom are women, get an education and graduate. In particular, the graduates learn how they can empower themselves through education. He noted that he sometimes works without pay for weeks at a time. He asked that leaders of the Commonwealth, and the Commissioners, support the efforts of WAITT House to educate all.

Those attending filled out a survey which asked them to identify the top concerns facing Massachusetts women. These were: violence against women and housing and economic development/stability. These were followed closely by: health care, childcare, education, welfare reform, girl's issues, elder care and discrimination in the workplace.

Other survey comments included, "We need to stop cutting the issues up into smaller and smaller slices, and affirm in concrete terms our commitment to some standard of care and quality of life for all MA residents. More discussion and a campaign to restore revenues is needed to do this." And, "Education for all immigrants and continual bilingual education is needed," as is "support for employers in supporting staff with childcare issues."

MCSW Attends MassFESS Update

Pictured above are a guy with a mustache and MCSW Commissioner Kateri Walsh at the MassFESS release of the update of the standard in Springfield.

"Status of MA Women" Report Issued

As part of its mandate to study, review and report on the status of women in the Commonwealth, the MCSW participated in the 2002 publication and release of *"The Status of Women in Massachusetts — Politics, Economics, Health, Rights, Demographics,"* a project of the Institute for Women's Policy Research. This invaluable document identifies the current status of women of the Commonwealth across a wide spectrum of key indicators. It is an extremely useful tool for planning and public policy change. To receive a copy, contact the Commission at 617-626-6520 or e-mail mcsw@state.ma.us.

MCSW Partners With Habitat For Humanity on WomenBuild

The MCSW is forging a statewide alliance with Habitat for Humanity on its WomenBuild projects.

WomenBuild is a program initiated by Habitat for Humanity to both construct homes for families in need and to foster confidence within women that they can actively contribute to the construction of simple affordable housing. Throughout the nation more than 350 homes are WomenBuild constructed.

Women from all walks of life, from the State House to the neighborhoods in which the homes are built, have joined forces to plan, finance, and physically construct WomenBuild homes. The homes are for women — and will be constructed and financed by women. The project is about building and sustaining hope for women and their families through providing simple, safe and affordable housing.

The first project that the MCSW is involved with is currently underway in the Merrimack Valley, where over 350 women have banded together to build two homes for two families. The construction of two duplexes in Haverhill is a project of the Greater Lawrence Habitat for Humanity. The two, three-bedroom homes will cost $150,000 and are slated to be ready to be habitable by December of this year.

MCSW Chair Marianne Fleckner and Executive Director Linda Brantley attended the "Wall Raising" kick off event of the project in May and participated in the program. The full Commission will spend time working at the site over the summer.

Fifth Anniversary Celebration

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The Commission is proud that two of its "Founding Mothers" currently serve on the Commission — Martha Chadwick and Jo Anne Thompson.

Program participants included Lt. Governor Kerry Healey; Representative Karen Spilka, Co-Chair of the Women's Caucus; Marianne Fleckner, MCSW Chair; Linda Brantley, the Commission's new Executive Director and Yoko Kato, domestic violence activist.

Lt. Governor Kerry Healey began the program with welcoming remarks and was congratulated by MCSW Chair Marianne Fleckner for the Administration's formation of a permanent Commission on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault, which Healey will chair. The Commission is proud that it will be part of this very important initiative.

Chair Fleckner outlined the many accomplishments of the Commission in the past five years, while Executive Director Brantley highlighted the current status of women in Massachusetts, maintaining that much remains to be done.

Kato, the keynote speaker, told how 10 years ago she lost her daughter and grandson to domestic violence at the hands of the baby's father. The experience dramatically altered her life, prompting her to devote much of her time and energy to fighting for the elimination of violence. Kato's work here, and in her native Japan, resulted in the Japanese Government passing its first Domestic Violence Law in 2001.

Honored at the May 19 event were MCSW "Founding Mothers" Jo Anne Thompson, Dessina Williams, Samantha Overton Bussell, Nancy Ryan, Executive Director of the Cambridge Women's Commission, and Marie Turley, Executive Director of the Boston Women's Commission.

Updates Needed For Women's Issues Clearinghouse

The MCSW exists to serve as a resource and referral source for the women of Massachusetts. To this end it has created, and maintains, a clearinghouse of information relative to women and families across the Commonwealth. The clearinghouse strives to include information on all agencies and organizations statewide that serve women.

If you have not already done so, please add the Commission to your mailing list and forward information on your organization for the Commission to utilize and/or to post on its Web site.

The Commission would also like to link with other organizations. To pursue this, contact Paula Daddona, Program Manager and Web master, at 617-626-6520.

New England Women's Political Summit, October 26 & 27

The Commission is pleased to join with New England sister state Women's Commissions to co-sponsor the New England Women's Political Summit, which will be held on October 26 & 27 at the JFK Library in Boston.

The event is spearheaded by the Center for Women in Politics and Public Policy at UMASS Boston. The Summit will bring together women from every walk of political life to examine the current status of women in politics in each of the New England states, share strategies to strengthen women's impact on politics, develop targets for increased representation and influence, and generate concrete action plans for increasing women's representation at the municipal, state and national levels in each of the six states.

This two-day event will commence with a pre-summit panel and reception which will feature nationally prominent women in politics discussing what it takes for women to "make it" in the field. A full-day conference will follow that will include prominent women in politics from the New England region sharing their stories and strategies, as well as time for planning and strategizing on how women can make a difference in the future. Over 400 women are anticipated to attend.

"The Commission is proud to join with the Center for Women in Politics and Public Policy and other sponsors to bring this fabulous conference to Massachusetts," said Executive Director Linda Brantley. "This type of project directly addresses the Commission's charge to identify and recommend qualified women for appointed positions at all levels of government."

MCSW Commissioners

Marianne Fleckner, *Chair*
Elaine Guiney, *Vice-Chair*
Jo Anne Thompson, *Secretary*
Kathleen Casavant, *Treasurer*
Martha B. Chadwick
Donna Finneran
Barbara Gomes-Beach
Mary Clare Higgins
Frances X. Hogan
Helen Jackson
Mary Reardon Johnson
Dianne Luby
Roseanna Means
Angela Menino
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